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طقوس اللعنةَ

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EXECRATION RITUAL
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Kerry Muhlestein

Ächtungsritual
Rituel d'envoûtement

The execration ritual was intended to prevent rebellious actions by Egyptians, foreigners, or supernatural forces by textually and kinetically destroying enemies via inanimate, animal, or human substitutes. Execration rites are attested throughout Pharaonic history.

الغرض من طقوس اللعنةَ كان مَنْع أعمالِ التمرد مِن المصريين، الأجانب، أو القوى الخارقة وذلك بتحطيم العدو نصيا و حركياً من خلال بدائل من الجماد، الحيوان، أو بدائل إنسانية. ظهرت طقوس في كافة مراحل التاريخِ الفرعونِي.

Execration rituals were stylized magical actions aimed at thwarting or eradicating foes and were similar in nature to other protective measures, such as apotropaic animal sacrifice or walking on depictions of enemies. Execration rites took place from at least early in the Old Kingdom through the Roman Period. Over 1,000 execration deposits have been found, mostly in cemeteries, notably at Semna, Uronarti, Mirgissa, Elephantine, Thebes, Balat, Abydos, Helwan, Saqqara, and Giza. Main sources for understanding the rite are the surviving manuscripts of its various versions, plus texts that were often inscribed on the ritual objects and thus became a physical component of the ritual. Important texts include Papyrus Bremner-Rhind, P. Louvre 3129, P. British Museum 10252 , and P. Salt 825. Execration texts could be as simple as lists of forces and people against whom the rite was enacted, or could contain substantial formulae. Variations on the concept behind the rite eventually spawned both love charms and spells for warding off bad dreams.

The earliest traceable manifestations of aspects of the rite are motifs of bound prisoners (part of Egypt's earliest iconography) and actions connected to offerings and purification rituals. As to the latter, Assmann (1994: 51) suggests that after red pots were used for offerings they had to be destroyed and that the smashing of these pots was assigned an overlapping meaning of scaring away—or eventually destroying—enemies (cf. Pyramid Texts 23 and 244). Purification rites also involved the use of red pots. In the Pyramid Texts, warding off enemies often precedes and/or succeeds both offering and purification pericopes. PT 214, for example, illustrates the need for warding off the inimical during purification. This connection continued throughout Pharaonic history and is perhaps best reflected in the Festival of the Kites (the birds that symbolized the goddesses Isis and Nephthys), which purified and placed protection around the temple, and during which Seth was driven to the executioner and a "great rite of protection" was performed (Faulkner 1936: 127-129). The text repeatedly notes that those who know creation can also eliminate

their own enemies (Faulkner 1937: 172; 1938: 41-42), thus tying the re-creative aspect of purification to execration. While the use of (predominantly red) pots continued in funerary offerings for millennia, by the Old Kingdom the ritual of smashing pots had given birth to independent execration rites. By the Middle Kingdom execration texts had become standardized (though they would change over time), perhaps indicating that the rite had also taken a standard form. Some execration rites arose due to specific circumstances, but at least by the Late Period there were also both daily and cyclical festival execrations (Faulkner 1937: 169, 171, 174).

Execration rites could be aimed at political, preternatural, or personal enemies. The political and preternatural were often tied together. *The Book of Felling Apophis*, for example, instructs that the rite will fell the enemies of Ra, Horus, *and* Pharaoh (Faulkner 1937: 171, 173-175). Political rituals likely began as attempts to deal with rebellious Egyptians, but soon included rebellious vassals and foreign enemies, and were almost always directed toward potential problems as a type of proactive apotropaic measure. The victims of these rites were those who, whether dead or alive, would in the future (using the future relative sDmtj.fj form) rebel, conspire rebellion, or think of speaking, sleeping, or dreaming rebelliously, or with ill-intent. These vague enemies, as well as specific individuals, groups, or geographic locations, were named for things they *might* do in the future, though some individuals presumably were included because of things they had already done. The standardization of the texts, the concern with foreign entities, and the desire to protect the state, ruler, and divine, combined with the knowledge of foreign politics, geography, and leaders that the texts demonstrate, all indicate that these were state-sponsored rites.

The figures and pots used in the rites were often inscribed with the rebellion formula, but sometimes only with personal names (not necessarily foreign), and were frequently not inscribed at all. Simple rites associated with private graves, and those exhibiting only personal names or no text, indicate an individual use of execration rituals, as well. Private, small-scale rituals are far less archaeologically visible, especially when they involved the use of cheaper, less durable substances. Versions of execration were carried out both on a large-scale basis by the state and on a small scale by individuals throughout Egyptian history.

While red pots were the earliest objects utilized in the rites, and remained a common article of manipulation, by the late Old Kingdom, papyrus, hairballs, figurines, statues, and statuettes made of clay, stone, wax, or wood were also used. Live animals also likely composed a component of the ritual. If the Bremner-Rhind Papyrus is any indication, wax figures and a fresh sheet of papyrus, on which the targeted name was written, were among the most commonly used materials. The animals, hair, papyrus, wood, and wax ritual victims are largely archaeologically invisible, making the known (mostly clay) remains of the ritual a vast under-representation of the frequency of the rite. At the most complete execration find—the Middle Kingdom fortress at Mirgissa—besides the remnants of melted wax, other trace remains indicate the use of nearly 200 broken inscribed red vases, over 400 broken uninscribed red vases, nearly 350 mud figurines, four limestone figures, and one human, whose head was ritually severed and buried upside down as part of the rite (Ritner 1993: 153-154; Vila 1973). Similar evidence of human victims as execration figures also appears in an early 18th-Dynasty context at Avaris (Fuscaldo 2003).

Within a full execration, each ritual action could require a separate rite, and though not every execration included all of the following components, some did: ritual objects could be bound, smashed (red pots, probably with a pestle), stomped on, stabbed, cut, speared, spat on, locked in a box, burned, and saturated in urine, before (almost always) being buried (sometimes upside down). As an example, a portion of one rite calls for the object to be bound and gives subsequent instructions to "spit on him four times . . . trample on him

with the left foot . . . smite him with a spear . . . slaughter him with a knife . . . place him on the fire . . . spit on him in the fire many times" (Schott 1929: 5). A full rite could employ any of these actions numerous times with numerous figures. Thus various magical measures were taken to prevent chaotic forces from acting before they could even begin.

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The most important primary sources of the execration ritual are from versions found in the temple of Osiris at Abydos, in the temple of Amonrasonter at Thebes, and in Papyrus Salt 825 [= Papyrus B.M. 10051]. The Abydos texts include P. Louvre 3129 and P. British Museum 10252, and are included in *Urkunden VI*: 4 – 59 (Schott 1929). The Theban version is found in P. Bremner-Rhind [= P. British Museum 10188] (Faulkner 1936, 1937, 1938). Papyrus Salt 825 (= Papyrus B.M. 10051) is discussed by Derchain (1965). The most significant publications of the texts inscribed on the objects are Abu Bakr (1973), Osing (1976), Posener and van de Walle (1940), Posener (1987), Sethe (1926), Wimmer (1993), and Vila (1963; 1973). The most comprehensive treatment of execration is by Ritner (1993), with a valuable contribution about the origins of the ritual by Assmann (1994). Gee (fc.) has traced the history of a specific priesthood line that performed the rites for several generations during the Ptolemaic Period and has identified the space within the temple of Montu at Karnak where they performed the ritual. Faraone (1993) and Raven (1983) contribute valuable discussions of wax as an object of manipulation in rites.

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